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EZEKIEL'S CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIOLOGY.

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THE prophecies of Ezekiel are literature in the highest sense. He was a man of the book and the study, delighting in the calm of meditation, and in giving "parlor lectures" on pressing and timely themes. It is this character of the man and his work that accounts for the neglect which he suffers. People do not understand him.

The problem.—But considering him as a man of theory, we may find a central plan in his work that involves a definite philosophy of life and events. It is with the mysteries that he has to do. His life, which is always subordinate, gives us glimpses of the way these mysteries were laid before him. In the dark days of despair which followed the wicked reign of Manasseh, a gloom which the purity and uprightness of the boy-king could not dispel, the father had named the child Ezekiel—"God will strengthen or prevail." For several years "God will strengthen or prevail" was sounding in his ears, speaking of conflict, of the battling of nations, of the might of the God of all hosts—his God. Then came the death of Josiah, that best of kings, dead, seemingly, before his time, falling in defense of Judah at the hand of Israel's oldest and worst enemy; and during the widespread lamentation that followed this boy's father turned his troubled face to his son and said, "Ezekiel," or "God will prevail." Youth and young manhood passed in the calamitous days of Jehoiakim, when the nation with increasing momentum hurried on to ruin. A rainbow of hope circled the mockery of his name when Jehoiakim died and Coniah came to the throne, but the light faded when the choice families of Judah were taken captive, and Ezekiel in the train of Coniah found himself in Babylon. Five years of painful suspense—during which

some said they would all return, while others doubted, and Jeremiah wrote, "build your houses and settle yourselves in the alien land, for return is not to be expected"—brought the darkness of blighted hope.

Ezekiel's world was full of mysteries. He had hoped to fill the office of priest, but he had been torn from the temple—what place was there for a priest among the captives? The holy temple was defamed; idolatry was crowding the true worship, the priests were corrupt—what was the future of the priesthood? Judah was crumbling; Judah, the prince of the brethren, the chosen of the nations! Beset on every side, the prey of all peoples, lacking strength to withstand the pressure within and without—what of the homeland? Was Jehovah to be forgotten? Had he been outwitted by heathen gods? Were all prophecies to fail? It was all very well to talk of accommodating one's self to circumstances and to make the best of the situation, as Jeremiah suggested; to marry heathen wives and smooth the rough path of captivity, as the exiles were so quickly doing; but it was not very well to join one's self to idols and to forget one's birthright; no, not if there be a heart of loyalty within and a tongue to sing:

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget her cunning,
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,
If I remember thee not;
If I prefer not Jerusalem
Above my chief joy.

Here is a great-minded exile brooding over the sorrows and working out the salvation of the homeland, a Dante who, through love of that which is lost, rises to the vision of the eternal, who through the blurred glass of calamity could see the illimitable expanse of life, and in it could catch the fair form of the perfect society.

The theory.—Judea was the scene of all his dreams. It was his Arcadia, perhaps because it was lost to him. The temple—dignified by history, enriched by tradition, sanctified by the divine presence, glorified by distance, idealized by invisibility—conditioned all his thought. His vision was narrow; he found

but one kernel of good within his reach, and that was the sincere worship of the temple. But the temple as it was could not satisfy him; it was profaned with idolatry. It took faith for him to discover the seed-corn; it required more than faith to discern in it the germ of a perfect social structure; the seer alone might have that vision. What hope for better days and better living save through thrashing and winnowing? Jerusalem must fall; the temple must become a ruin; Judah must be scattered among the nations; from beneath the flail and the fan the new society must be gathered, cleansed, sown, husbanded. We are to think of the meaning of it to Ezekiel.

The aggravating cause of much of Israel's trouble in the past had been the idolatrous nations on every side. Israel was a field of wheat in a world of tares. It is a venerable fallacy that tares are but degenerate wheat. The fallacy adds weight to the fact that many of these idolatrous nations were allied to Israel by kinship, trade, and treaty. It was an awful fact that Ezekiel could not blink—Judah, of all the nations of the time, had built a pantheon for the gods of the earth. Jeremiah's question to the idolaters in the holy city, "What nation hath changed its gods which are no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit," required no answer. There was no answer. And here again was the mystery. Israel had been chosen for a light to the gentiles, and, behold, his glory had become death-shade. Ezekiel's problem was complicated by national alliances. Everything that would menace the safety and development of Israel must be removed with the chaff of his own people. These nations were tares, and tares only. They had choked the ground, and must be gathered for the burning. He had no hope for their purification; Judah, as the means of cleansing, had himself become foul; wait till the harvest. It is the old story of the one sound apple in the midst of worms and decay; of the pure-minded youth who chooses vicious associates for the good he may do them; of the woman who marries a drunkard that she may reform him. You will sometimes think him harsh and vindictive in his treatment of the aliens, and then you must turn to

his attitude toward the false of his own nation. What think you? Should he be more gentle with the stranger than with the friend? Then were he neither just nor human. Let it be said to his praise that his own, his kin, his loved ones, received the same condemnation as those who were hateful to him. This is the seal of the true prophet as it is of the true man.

The destruction of the beloved city and the wiping out of the wicked nations which were allied to it would leave a clear field. The seed-corn of the new kingdom would then be sown. It must be sown if aught of good is to grow in the world; if there is to be any joy for the husbandman or any song at the harvest. And yet no good seed ever came to blossom in so fair a field without a struggle. "While the good man slept an enemy came and sowed tares in the field." Ezekiel was not blind to the world-wide conflict. He did not think of building his perfect society on the holy hill with a desert all about it, or even hope, much less expect, that the rest of the world would go on in its evil way with indifference. His was no Atlantis with a great sea between it and all the world; nor a monastic system of strong walls, heavily barred doors, and life-vows; no community—some Brook Farm or Amana—to which the like-minded might flee, saying: "As for me, I will serve the Lord apart from the wickedness and whirl of society." The past had proven the weakness of such an attempt. God had pavilioned Jerusalem in the eternal hills, the nations had passed on either side and left it unmolested; but when it came into contact with the nations it went to pieces, it was going to pieces before his eyes. The only hope for Israel's purity was in remaining in the world while not of the world, and in battling for the right against all the odds which the evil-minded might devise. And here he touches the thought of Jesus when He rebukes selfish asceticism. Out of this distant past comes the message: Evil is to be thrust out, not by running from it, but by fighting it. But Ezekiel was a man of hope, else were he no prophet. By faith he sees the triumph of the right, and shouts the certainty of the victory into the ears of the people to give them strength and hope. Around him the harps were hung upon the willows; his friends, stung by the jeering

request, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion," retort: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in the land of a stranger?" Perhaps not; they may be justified in their depression; but shall the Lord's people *forget* the Lord's song? Is there no hope that they shall some day sing it in the Lord's own land? And the prophet answers, "Yes," and there is no false ring in it, because he sees the clouds parting and a new nation, as a bride adorned for her husband, arising around a new temple on Mount Zion.

Sociological value.—The theory is a four-stranded, twisted cable of human life. Everything about it is full of life. (1) There must be a process of sifting to find the seeds of good. (2) There must be cleansing and testing to insure a righteous stock. (3) The life thus started must prove its right to live in conflict with universal evil; it must arm itself and become an archangel with its foot on the dragon. (4) Then, and then only, may peace come and the perfect state be realized. It is mastery, but through the victory of the truth; moral mastery, an overturning, overturning, overturning, until he whose right it is to rule shall come to receive his crown from a willing people. Like all prophets, time was of no real value to him when he had his beatific vision in his eye. His accuracy in marking time as a matter of history is noticeable, but he has no gauge for the flight of his fancy. Time measures mundane things; prophets feel the sweep of the eternities. So real was the vision that he could not doubt its nearness; so clearly did he see the outlines, and so great faith had he, that the centuries shrank to years, or even days. His work is not one whit invalidated by this foreshortening; it opens it to criticism, and it may be that only a prophet may discover its highest worth; it is certain that we must stand in his place and acknowledge that every picture of mind, brush, or pen gains its truth by its position. After Correggio had decorated the dome of the cathedral in Parma, the chapter and the people were dissatisfied with it, and a mason's boy called it "a hash of frogs;" but a few years later Titian passed that way and said: "If you had filled the dome with gold, you would not have paid what it is worth." And so it is with

the work of Ezekiel: the mass of men have called it a meaningless jumble, while a few scholars have bowed before it as of incomparable value. And when you range yourself by the side of the prophet, you discover that all his theories spring from a strong tap-root. Twenty-seven years passed between the vision of the whirlwind and the day in which he laid down his pen, having written, "and the name of the city from that day shall be Yahweh-shammah"—"Jehovah is there." His theory was the working out of a principle that was first and last with him. Wherever you approach him, his answer is ready and is always the same. The perfect, ideal state must not simply take account of religion; it must be religious. The question of church and state might not enter; the church was to be the state, and the state was to be the church. You may say that it is like a priest to be so biased that he can see nothing but religion, but in all honesty, granting this for the time, ought not we to consider his thought as a balance to that which is so prejudiced that it takes no account of religion at all? Possibly it was Schelling who first lent a great name to the theory that all society was of necessity religious, but Ezekiel spoke some centuries before Schelling, gave the weight of his thought to the same theory, and overtopped the modern philosopher by standing for the higher truth: the perfect society can never be founded on a false religion; it demands the highest in its purity; the true religion must dominate all of thought and all of life. It pays to thread the labyrinth of his visions, to double and redouble on our track, if this may be borne in upon our minds so that there is no forgetting it.